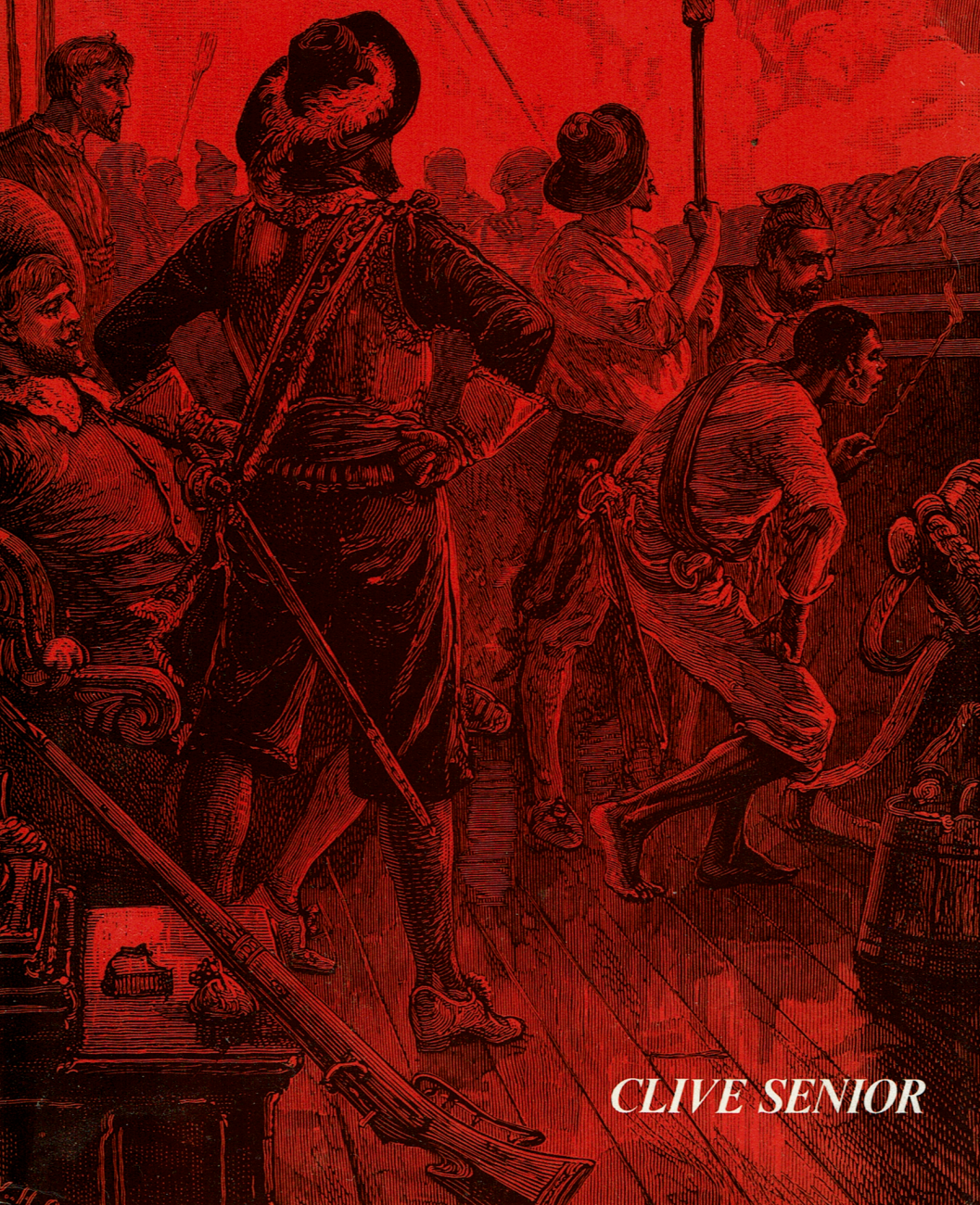


A Nation of Pirates

English Piracy in its Heyday



CLIVE SENIOR

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David & Charles Newton Abbot London Vancouver
Crane, Russak & Company, Inc New York

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First published 1976 by
David & Charles (Publishers) Limited
Brunel House Newton Abbot Devon
(ISBN 0 7153 7264 5)

Published in the United States of America by
Crane, Russak & Company, Inc
347 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10017
(ISBN 0-8448-1012-6)
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 76-28611

Published in Canada by
Douglas David & Charles Limited
1875 Welch Street North Vancouver BC

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Set in 11 on 13pt Times and printed in
Great Britain by Latimer Trend & Company Ltd Plymouth

Contents

Introduction	7
1 'On the Account' in the Early Seventeenth Century	13
2 Pirate Hunting Grounds	43
3 The Confederation of Deep-Sea Pirates	48
4 Teaching the Turks	78
5 Pirates of the Thames	110
6 Last Days of the Land Pirates	124
7 English Piracy in Decline	145
References	153
Select Bibliography	158
Index	161

Introduction

After the death of our most gracious Queene Elizabeth of blessed memory, our Royall King Iames who from his infancie had reigned in peace with all Nations, had no imployment for those men of warre, so that those that were rich rested with that they had; those that were poore and had nothing but from hand to mouth, turned Pirats . . .

– Capt John Smith, *The bad life and conditions of Pyrats*

The year 1603 was of great significance, both for England as a whole and for English seamen in particular. It marked the watershed between the Tudor and Stuart dynasties; between war and peace. Elizabeth, for all her diplomacy, was, in the last resort, a queen of war; James Stuart was a monarch whose rule, both in Scotland and England, was blessed by peace. For the English, nearly twenty years of continual war under Elizabeth were followed by an even longer period of peace under James.

Conditions at sea at the beginning of the seventeenth century strongly favoured an increase in piracy, and because of their peculiar seafaring experience it was the English, of all the nations, who were best able to exploit the situation. They had been conditioned by the expansion of privateering during the war with Spain, which had fired the popular imagination with a sense of excitement and adventure, and had drained a large proportion of the wealth and energy of the country. The capacity of the English to wage private war by sea was unparalleled as the new century began, and the vigour of English maritime enterprise was even felt abroad, where Englishmen were prominent in financing and manning the privateers of other nations. Because of this aggressiveness, English seamen had already gained a reputation as arch-pirates by 1600.

The sudden transition from war to peace naturally threw the problem of piracy into sharp relief. Piracy had, of course, existed in Elizabeth's reign, but then much of the maritime

aggression of the English had been absorbed by privateering – a system whereby private ships were authorised by commissions of reprisal or letters of marque to go to sea to make war on the enemy and to capture hostile shipping and goods. Privateering was not always confined to wartime. Letters of marque were also issued during periods of peace to authorise merchants and others to recoup losses which they had suffered at the hands of foreigners. However, this was not true during James's reign, for the king adamantly refused to issue letters of marque to his subjects in any circumstances. James was a Scot with little appreciation of the concept of privateering, which to him seemed to be not far removed from piracy. There was, indeed, considerable support for such a view. The main aim of privateers – the acquisition of booty – was the same as that of pirates. The only difference between the two was that the privateer's depredations were supposed to be governed by the limits of his commission. In practice, however, many privateers acted no better than pirates, pursuing their booty at will and committing spoils which could never be justified by their commissions.

Because of James's uncompromising attitude on privateering, the transition from war to peace was more abrupt than it might otherwise have been; in effect, a nation which had grown accustomed to living by plunder at sea was suddenly forbidden from taking prizes under any circumstances.

Under these conditions, there could be no confusion about what constituted piracy. A pirate was, quite simply, anyone who resorted to robbery and violence on the sea or in the creeks and rivers which came under admiralty jurisdiction. Some Englishmen tried to circumvent the law by obtaining foreign letters of marque and claiming that they should be treated as foreign privateers rather than pirates. However, this loophole was soon closed by royal proclamation, and after 1605 all British subjects found serving aboard foreign privateers were unhesitatingly treated as pirates.

There are signs that piracy was becoming popular with English seamen at the turn of the sixteenth century, and that the number of depredations would have continued to increase even if the safety-valve of privateering had not been closed.

During the latter stages of the war with Spain, it had become common for captains of privateers to exceed the limits of their commissions or to ignore them completely. This was especially true in the Mediterranean where the Venetians and Tuscans suffered heavy losses at the hands of unscrupulous English marauders. In 1591, Elizabeth issued a proclamation forbidding her seamen from meddling with the shipping of these two countries, and in 1602 the drastic step was taken of banning privateers from the Mediterranean altogether. Yet once they had put to sea, these private warships were beyond government control and greedy crews often pressurised their captains to take prizes regardless of what nationality they were. In June 1603, only days before privateering was officially ended, the Earl of Salisbury was informed that:

All sailors of late are fallen into such vile order that they shame not to say that they go to sea to rob all nations, and unless the captain consent thereto, he is not fit for this time.¹

It was, of course, only to be expected that a period of war would be followed by an outbreak of lawlessness at sea. Because of this, certain ministers accepted the news of depredations stoically, reasoning that the problem would soon pass as things returned to normal. Salisbury himself was an advocate of this view, as was Lord Admiral Nottingham, whose observation on the outburst of piracy was that it was only to be expected that 'such loose and bad persons would be stirring'.²

Yet piracy was to pose a more permanent and dangerous threat than anyone could have foreseen in 1603. In the first place, there were simply more seamen who were willing to take to piracy. The total number of the English maritime population (including fishermen and wherry-men), had stood at some 16,000 in 1582. This number had been trebled by nearly two decades of war, so that by 1603 there were about 50,000 seamen who had either to find a job or starve.³ There had been no comparable increase in peaceful employment to absorb such an increase in numbers. Expansion in the east-coast collier traffic and in the Iceland and Newfoundland fisheries had created some new jobs,

but trade with Spain had disappeared and was to take some time to become re-established. The only other new employment available was in voyages to the East Indies, which at least offered some solution to the unemployment problem, since many of the men who went on them never returned.

The spectre of unemployment and the related problem of piracy were apparent as soon as the warships were called home. In the summer of 1603 the ports and towns of England were swollen by bands of idle seamen. On 26 June (only three days after privateering had been officially ended), the mayor of Plymouth wrote to the Privy Council, describing the situation in his city:

... since our late Queen's death, there do daily resort heither such a great number of sailors, mariners and other masterless men, that heretofore have been at sea in men of war, and being now restrained from that course do still remain here and pester our town which is already overcharged with many poor people. And some of them do daily commit such intolerable outrages as they steal and take away boats in the night out of the harbour and rob both English and French . . .⁴

This picture was repeated in most other major ports. Similar letters were received by the Council from the mayors of Bristol and Dartmouth, and things were no better in London, where opportunities for robbing vessels were more numerous.

Numbers apart, the threat from piracy was greater than ever before. The war with Spain had made men careless of life and more willing to risk all in the pursuit of easy riches. Even those who had gone on unsuccessful privateering voyages had at least been able to entertain hopes of becoming rich. Aboard privateers, seamen had grown accustomed to 'loose liberty and an undisciplined life' which they could never hope to recapture in peacetime voyages. Many seamen could not even remember the time when their country had been at peace. The end result of long years of war was to perfect the English fighting vessel and to turn the English sailor into a skilful and experienced fighting man. It was hard to ask these discharged seamen to forget their new talents just because peace had arrived.

As the war years receded, piracy showed no signs of diminish-

ing; rather the reverse. King James's own estimate of pirate strength, made in 1608, was that there were no fewer than 500 sail of pirate ships in the ocean, while another anxious observer predicted in the same year that 'where there was now one sail of pirates, within this half year for every one there would be 20'.⁵ Whatever value is placed on such statements, one thing is clear: English piracy was a growing menace fast gaining momentum.

1

'On the Account' in the Early Seventeenth Century

This wicked-gotten treasure
Doth him but little pleasure;
The land consumes what they have got by sea,
In drunkenness and lechery,
Filthy sins of sodomy,
Their evil-gotten goods do waste away.
— *The Seaman's Song of Captain Ward, the Famous
Pirate of the World*

Pirates were uncharacteristically reticent when it came to describing their crimes, and few would ever use the word 'piracy' where a euphemism would do just as well. Depending on individual preference and the jargon of the day, they said that they had sailed 'on warfare', 'to take purchase', 'to go roving' or simply 'to do an exploit'. No doubt they hoped that such phrases might be taken to infer legitimate privateering rather than piracy and would thereby help them exculpate their crimes. There was, however, one phrase which was synonymous with piracy. Whenever a man said he had been 'on the account', there was no mistaking exactly what he meant.

The increase of English piracy after 1603 was an all-too-obvious phenomenon. Henry Mainwaring, a famous pirate leader who wrote a discourse on piracy which was presented to the king in 1618, thought that 'there have been more Pirates by ten to one than were in the whole reign of the last Queen'. Such personal assessments should obviously be treated with care, but there is little evidence to the contrary. Nearly all those who were involved with piracy in some way or other, whether as naval captains, ship's masters, merchants or government officials, believed the threat to be greater in James's reign than it had been in Elizabeth's. There was also a noticeable change in

the character of English piracy, particularly in the Atlantic. The pirates of the early seventeenth century were more independent, better armed, better equipped, better organised and more closely-knit than ever before. They were also becoming increasingly 'international'. Operating from bases outside England, especially in Ireland and North Africa, they roamed hundreds of leagues of ocean and, with the general expansion of trading horizons, were increasingly drawn to making a profit from the waters of the New World.

The first quarter of the seventeenth century is, therefore, a particularly interesting period in which to examine the business of piracy – the men, their way of life, their ships, their tactics – in short to attempt a detailed view of pirates and their operations from the 'inside'. Such a view is bound to be circumscribed by the amount of material available. One major source of evidence is the sworn testimonies of seafaring men and others, which were painstakingly transcribed by the clerks of the High Court of Admiralty and which survive in the 'Examination Books' of that court. Many of these testimonies contain detailed information about seamanship and pirate life which are of particular interest to the historian, although to court officials at the time they must have appeared as little more than colourful irrelevancies.

A further, unexpected source of evidence is a discourse entitled *Of the Beginnings, Practices, and Suppression of Pirates*, written in 1616 or 1617 by Henry Mainwaring, one of the leading pirates of the day, as thanksgiving for his pardon. This work, practically unique in the annals of piracy, deserves to be ranked alongside that of A. O. Exquemelin, the barber's surgeon who sailed with the buccaneers in the West Indies and who described his experiences in *De Americaensche Zee-Roovers* (published some sixty years after Mainwaring's work).

Having gained an Oxford degree, Mainwaring was probably better qualified to put pen to paper than most pirates. His piratical career lasted for less than three years, from the time he left England in the summer of 1613 until his return late in 1615, but during that time he commanded a band of several hundred rovers based in Morocco and gained considerable knowledge of

the activities of pirates in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. He divided his work into sections dealing with such aspects of piracy as the beginnings of pirates, the reasons that men became pirates, pirate tactics and ports of call, and rounded the whole thing off with his own suggestions for clearing the seas. The detailed nature of parts of the work, especially the section dealing with ports of call, which reads like a Pirate's Baedeker, suggests that Mainwaring had been taking notes whilst still at sea, with a view to writing down his experiences and observations. Pirates were not usually anxious to discuss their exploits with anyone outside the fraternity. The real value of *The Discourse* is that it was written by a man who was not merely a partaker in events, but a central figure, and one who knew his subject well.

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As might be expected, most recruits to piracy were men with previous seafaring experience. In a sample of more than 700 men who were indicted for piracy in the first forty years of the seventeenth century, no less than 73% were described as sailors or mariners. If those with specialised jobs aboard ships, such as gunners, carpenters, surgeons, navigators and trumpeters are taken into account, then at least three out of every four men in this sample were experienced seamen. This still leaves a significant number whose first real experience of the sea was as pirates. Some of these were gentlemen and merchants – the 'better sort' – but many had previously gained a living from the land as yeomen, husbandmen or labourers, while still more came from urban areas where they had held down jobs as shoemakers, grocers, innkeepers, coopers, joiners and the like.

These 'landsmen' were drawn to piracy by the call of the sea and the promise of easy pickings. Some had little choice in the matter. A pirate captain who needed able-bodied men did not care too much about their seafaring qualifications and was likely to make up his numbers in the manner described by Dabone:

... wanting men he invites some strangers ore
Into his Barcke, in height of wine and game,
He flips his anchor, and reveals his name.¹

These were the very tactics used by Captain James Harris at Baltimore in 1609. Roger Nottinge, a London poulterer, who was in Ireland to visit his sister, was one of the men shanghaied by Harris. Nottinge had gone to Baltimore with a man who owed him money for a horse which he had sold him in London. This man invited the unsuspecting Nottinge aboard Harris's ship,

... and there gave him good store of drinck untill he was drunck and soe was putt into a Cabon where he slepte untill the next day in the morninge and then awakinge, lookinge aboute, found they had hoysted sayle and putt into the sea almoaste owte of sight of land . . .²

To see the attractions of piracy, one only has to examine the alternatives that were open to seamen in early seventeenth-century England. There was not much choice of maritime employment and although variety increased throughout the century, in the early decades more than half of all seamen were employed in the Iceland and Newfoundland fisheries, or in the Newcastle coal trade. Unless he had personal influence or outstanding ability, the common seaman was doomed to a life of hardship and labour. Yet his employment was never guaranteed; men were hired for a single voyage only, and when that was over they had to idle their time away in port until they could find a new berth. Worse still, much seaborne traffic was seasonal, and a large part of the merchant fleet was laid up during the winter months. Most sailors therefore had plenty of time to kill. Some were able to get temporary jobs ashore, but many remained idle, drinking away their money and waiting for their luck to change. There could hardly be a better conscript to piracy than the penniless, bored seaman.

Whether or not piracy was less arduous than legitimate employment is impossible to answer; the important point is that many seamen believed that it was. Certainly sailors who were press-ganged into the navy can have had little doubt on the subject. Abuses in the early Stuart navy were legion and as a result, conditions were deplorable. Ships were poorly victualled in both quality and quantity of provisions and the men who

served in them were also inadequately clothed, disease-ridden and subject to a harsh and excessive code of discipline which included such sadistic refinements as keel-hauling and tongue-scraping. Desertion was common and it is almost certain that more men died from malnutrition and disease than ever died in battle.

For undergoing this hardship and torment, the sailor aboard a royal ship received 10 shillings a month – little more than half of what his counterpart on a merchantman would have received. The rate, established in 1585, remained unchanged until 1625 and even then payment could not always be relied upon. Small wonder that those with money paid to avoid being pressed – a practice which gave rise to the saying that 'the pressmaster carryeth the able man in his pocket'. Because of this the navy was often left with the scum of the ports; men who would not have been able to earn their keep aboard a pirate ship. Pirates probably looked scornfully upon the sailors in the navy as incompetent seamen who were prepared to put up with intolerable conditions for a pittance. This at least was the view of the pirate captain James Harris, who described the crew of the royal pinnace which patrolled the Irish coast as 'beinge ragged beggars, some of the people haveinge somtimes amonge 100 men [not] fortie shirtes'.³

Freedom, companionship, food and wine in excess, riotous living – these were some of the inducements for the adventurous seaman to join a pirate ship. Yet the main attraction was plunder. The rapacious greed of seamen and their love of pillage was proverbial. Beside the thought of pillage all else paled into insignificance, for 'there is nothing that more bewitcheth them, nor anything wherein they promise to themselves so loudly nor delight in more mainly'.⁴ From time to time their appetite was whetted by the outbreak of wars, when privateers were licensed to issue forth, but in peacetime no such outlet existed – unless it was piracy. The promise of plunder meant more to seamen than the simple chance of acquiring wealth and possessions. It gave them hope which enabled them to live their lives under conditions of immense hardship. In the minds of many seamen, the chance of plunder was a great gamble; an opportunity for those

who cursed their luck and rued their lives to reverse their fortunes overnight. The conversations of seamen often revolved around half-forgotten memories and things which might have been. Such talk was the most effective defence against old age, hardship and disappointment.

The sailor's life was such that a spell in prison (even in a seventeenth-century prison) would have seemed preferable to life aboard ship. Mainwaring pointed out the futility of imprisoning seamen when 'their whole life for the most part is spent but in a running prison', a view which was later endorsed by Doctor Johnson, when he observed that:

No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in jail with the chance of being drowned . . . A man in jail has more room, better food, and commonly better company.

In practice there were no half measures for convicted pirates. To keep them in gaol for long would have been an unnecessary expense; they were either strung up or set free.

Even the gallows were not much of a deterrent to piracy. The threat was always there at the back of most pirates' minds, but then the threat of sudden death by drowning or some other disaster at sea was nothing new to most seamen. At least a rope provided a quick, clean passage out of the world – better than a slow lingering death from scurvy or the pox.

Hanging might have been a greater deterrent had it been used more often. Few of the pirates who were active during the first half of the century were captured and fewer still were hanged. King James issued pardons for pirates on several occasions and if an English pardon was not forthcoming it was not difficult to obtain one from a foreign state, particularly from Tuscany or Savoy. The government was, perhaps, unwilling to execute the full rigour of the law on all those who were known to have belonged to a pirate crew; to have done so would have been to destroy a section of the maritime population which could be relied upon as being 'the most daring and serviceable in war'.⁵ Therefore, the government sometimes only sought to make an example of a few of the ringleaders, but this in turn encouraged

others to flout the law. Mainwaring wrote that he knew from his experience that men were encouraged to become pirates,

... by reason of a received opinion and custom is here for the most part used, that none but the Captain, Master, and it may be some few of the principal of the Company shall be put to death.

Pirate careers often began modestly on the English or Irish coasts. It was easy for a group of malcontents to board ships which lay unattended, or manned only by a skeleton crew. In his *Discourse*, Mainwaring stated that many deep-sea pirates had begun by boarding small vessels at Gravesend, Tilbury Hope or Queenborough, whence they were able to 'put to sea before a wind, so that they cannot be stayed or prevented'. In fact, many of these seizures were no more than small-time local piracy, but for a few offenders such petty piracy was 'a fundation one the ground of which wee may raise our good hap'.⁶

One surprising example has survived of just such a piracy. Jonas Prophet was a Suffolk mariner who had been bosun's mate of the *Anne Royal* in the fleet which ferried James's daughter Princess Elizabeth over to Flushing for her wedding. On his return to London, Prophet had been discharged from the navy and decided to try his luck at piracy. He was, however, captured and in 1613 lay in the Marshalsea Prison under sentence of death. Somehow he managed to escape, and allying himself with a few other determined characters, boarded a small bark of King's Lynn which lay in the Thames. Sailing this boat up the River Colne as far as Colchester, Prophet pressed two boys into his service and then put out to sea. The bark can hardly have been a seaworthy craft, but Prophet and his crew of ten eventually arrived at Mamora on the Moroccan coast, where Prophet sold the bark which had served him so well and got himself a post as master of Captain Wilkinson's pirate ship.

The ambitious pirate's first aim after capturing a small craft was normally to get control of a better ship. The area around Ushant offered opportunities for capturing seaworthy vessels of up to 200 tons, which were engaged in the local Brittany trade, and which were undermanned and could therefore be easily overpowered. These vessels included small French ships, pinks

and 'brawmes' (a kind of Dutch coasting vessel), all of which had good sailing qualities. At this stage in his career, the main advantages of the aspiring pirate were superior numbers and surprise. One effective ruse was to conceal most of the men below decks and to invent some story or other in order to get near enough to another vessel to board her. Soon after John Ward had stolen a bark from Portsmouth, he was able to take a 70-ton Frenchman off the Scillies by 'passing many houres in courteous discourse'.⁷

Similar tactics were adopted by the sixteen pirates aboard the hoy *Eagle* of Sandwich. Led by a man named Harris, whose father was keeper of the castle at 'the Mounte', they had boarded the *Eagle* by night in May 1616 as she lay at Leigh. However, they soon discovered that their prize was a mediocre vessel, for although they gave chase to many ships, they were unable to catch any. After a week of fruitless pursuit, the pirates spied the *Black Dog*, a Zealand pink. Harris ordered his men below decks and forced the skipper of the *Eagle* (whom they had kept with them) to hail the *Black Dog* and ask for water. The Dutch master seeing no harm in the request, struck his topsail and,

... flung out a roape willinge him [the *Eagle*'s skipper] to fasten his pott to the roape, notwithstandinge the saied skipper steered his shippe and clapped this examinant's pinke upon her after quarter and soe soone as they came boarde for boarde, the Englishe boarded them.⁸

Pirates were greatly helped in these tactics by the contemporary practice of ships hailing one another at sea to discover the nationality and destination of passing vessels and also to learn the latest news. It was therefore easy for pirates to approach unsuspecting ships, especially since they were invariably in merchantmen themselves. It was difficult to distinguish between ships of different nations, and pirates collected the flags of captured ships and flew whichever one best suited their purpose. Thus they were able to get close to their prey before their identity was likely to be discovered. The near impossibility of distinguishing a pirate ship from a peaceful trader

posed considerable problems for ships' masters. In many respects the risk of being captured was greater for English shipping after 1604 than it had been in wartime, for as John Brook, master of the *Golden Dragon* of London, testified in 1609:

... seafareinge men are in farre greater dainger now then they were in the time of the Spanishe warres, by reason that then it was easie to know a man of warre, but now everie shalloppe is a man of warr and doethe carrie the coulors of everie nation, and soe, by devices and trickes doe gett aboarde and take merchante shipps, for that it is harde for anie to escape, insoe muche that hee beeleevethe there have been at leaste a hundred Engelishe ships taken and pillaged within this xii moneths.⁹

Even when pirates had sufficient strength to attack merchantmen openly, the guile of their early days never deserted them. Deception was always one of the strongest weapons in the pirate's armoury. When several pirate ships were working together, they would spread out at dawn so that they appeared as innocent merchantmen plying against the wind. They carried few sails, so that they were difficult to see at a distance and would not frighten their prey away. They kept a continual look-out at the tops of their ships and had a system of signalling to communicate 'when to chase, when to give over, where to meet, and how to know each other, if they see each other afar off'. They usually waited near capes and other likely places so that they could intercept ships rather than having to chase them. One favourite trick of pirates was to work their ship as though she were in distress. Another was to hang out buckets and other 'drags' underwater when the ship was under full sail, so that it appeared to be slow and cumbersome.

Even though their ships were heavily armed, the pirates' main advantage still lay in their superiority in numbers. Only as a last resort would they attempt to batter a prize into submission and risk destroying the prize, her cargo and many of their own men in the process. They preferred to close with a ship and board her at the first opportunity, so that their fierceness and experience would win the day. Before such an attack the

pirates might shatter the self-confidence of their victims by revealing their identity with the chilling cry 'we are of the sea'. A boarding-party was a fearsome sight, calculated to frighten the enemy into surrendering. The attack by John Ward and his men on the *John Baptist* was said to be 'verie suddeine, desperate and without feare'.¹⁰ The noise alone must have been enough to deter all but the most stout-hearted defenders. The proud crew of the Venetian argosy *Soderina* completely lost heart when faced with Ward's cut-throats at close quarters. Pirates, of course, realised their psychological advantage and exploited it to the full. Before they attacked the *Cock* of St Omer, Henry Stakes and his band loaded their guns with powder (but no shot), and then fired at the chests of the crew just to frighten them.

In battle, pirates cared little for their own safety. Most had nothing to lose and were spurred on by the thought of the plunder which they might find on board their prize. When they fought, it was usually to the death. Mainwaring remarked that he had 'seen them in fight, more willingly expose themselves to a present and certain death, than to a doubtful and long slavery'. Sometimes such reckless bravery could carry the day. When Captain Edward Jolliffe's ship was boarded by the crew of a Dutch man-of-war, he forced the Dutch to break off the action by threatening to set fire to his powder magazine and blow them all to smithereens. Captain Hills of Plymouth was not so lucky. In 1611, he and his crew of forty-five encountered three Spanish galleons and, rather than surrender, Hills fired his ship and he and his men perished in the sea, with the exception of twelve, who were rescued by the Spanish but who were suffering with severe burns.

Pirates rarely encountered much resistance because the crews of merchantmen were generally unwilling to risk their lives in defence of other men's property – property which might in any case be insured against loss. Pirates certainly looked favourably on ships which offered no resistance. It was common knowledge among seamen that anyone putting up a fight would have to pay a heavy price if they lost; whereas those who surrendered peacefully would probably be well treated and might even be allowed to continue on their way – after the rovers had ran-

sacked their ship. In 1611, the crew of the *William and Ralph* refused outright to give battle to the twenty-eight gun pirate ship of William Hughs, on the grounds that resistance could only serve to enrage the pirates and would lead to their being more harshly treated if they were captured.

For most ships' masters discretion was the better part of valour, although the master who surrendered his vessel without a fight might be accused of conspiracy. An interesting civil case was brought in the admiralty court in 1611 against Thomas Hunt, master of the *Gift of God*, who was alleged to have betrayed his ship and her lading of wheat and timber to Captain Parker, the pirate. The circumstances were that the *Gift*, which carried only four guns and was manned by ten men, was completely at the mercy of Parker's man-of-war, a 160-ton Flemish vessel which mounted twenty-three guns and had a crew of seventy. Flight was impossible – the *Gift* was fully laden, while the pirate ship, which was in any case fitted for speed, was only in ballast. Hunt called experienced witnesses to court to prove the hopelessness of his predicament. The evidence of one of these, Robert Rickman of Limehouse, thirty-six years a ship's master, is worth quoting at length for the light it throws on the accepted behaviour of the crews of merchantmen who found themselves at the mercy of pirates. To the charges levelled against Hunt, Rickman replied:

. . . hee knowethe that pirats at sea, when theye have taken any shippe, after theie have quietly possessed themselves of that theye woulde have, theie doe eate and drincke and make merrie, and some times cause them that they have taken to doe soe allsoe, although they bee taken sore againste theire will, nether can the eatinge and drinkeinge togeather bee justlie imputed to them that are taken as a presumption that they yeelded willingelie, for that beeing taken, theie are glad to doe any thinge that the pirats will admitte them to please them, beeing Captives and not at theire owne disposicion . . . hee knowethe [also] that it is the Custome amongeste Sea faringe men of the best sorte when theie finde themselves in such dainger that they are nether able to defende themselves by fighteinge nor to saile awaie from the pirats, to yeelde and submitte themselves in hope to obtaine favor, for otherwise theye are in dainger to bee slaine or made slaves. And hee saithe that it cannot be imputed to the saied

Hunte as a faulte yf hee did yeelede, beeinge soe unable to resiste as it appeareth by the articles hee was.¹¹

A typical description of an encounter with pirates was given by William Oakes, master of the *Primrose* of London, which was taken by Captain Francke in 1609:

... of the Northerne Cape [of Spain], a shippe of warre gave chase to them and comeinge neere them, this examinant and Companie called to them to beare up and they answered that they woulde not beare up for the proudeste merchaunte in the Sea, and putt out in theire lower teere thirteene peeces of ordenance and commaunded this examinant and companie to hoise out theire boate ...

This was normal procedure for most pirates. First they ordered the merchant, master or principal officers of their prize to board their ship and once they held them captive, a boarding party was sent to search the ship. With their hostages secure, the pirates could examine their prize at leisure and set about looting it systematically. The two vessels might remain together for days (on one occasion they were even tied together), and the ship would be released only after the pirates had finished looting her. The pirates would check bills of lading to see that none of the cargo had been concealed and question the crew of their prize to make sure that no money or items of value had been hidden.

Pirates frequently tortured their captives if they thought they were being cheated. Sometimes they tortured them simply for amusement. John Downes and his men, suspecting that the *Royal* of Leith had money hidden on board, whipped the master and two young boys and further tormented them by tightening knotted cords around their heads. These methods evidently met with success, for recorded amongst Downes's loot are six bags of reals-of-eight worth £400. Another favourite torture used by pirates was to place lighted matches under the fingernails of their victims and let them burn down. Whipping and beating were more obvious methods of intimidation, but Captain Stephenson showed considerable enterprise when he gave a carpenter the choice between joining his crew and being 'shot off

in a piece of ordinance'. William Baughe was particularly ruthless in his search for plunder. Learning that more than £3,000 in cash was concealed aboard a Flemish ship which had fallen into his hands, he straightway seized hold of one of the petrified crew and 'sawed his throte with a dagger untill the blood ran downe'. On rare occasions it was the pirates themselves who had to suffer the pain and indignity of being tortured. When some Flemish rovers captured Captain Francke, they were reported to have,

... spoyled him of all his welth, and also burned his fingers' endes of, and tormented him otherwise by the privy members, and many others of his company in most cruell maner . . .¹²

Once pirates had looted a vessel, they divided the booty on some agreed basis, often after the fashion of privateers, each member of the crew receiving a certain number of shares in accordance with his outlay in the venture and his office in the ship. Bravery in battle was probably an important factor in determining individual rewards. Geoffrey Wiseman, who served with Ward in the Mediterranean, said that he had 'such shares allowed him by the quarter masters, sometymes more, and sometymes lesse, as they thought he deserved'. A division of the loot could be made at any time, depending on the strength of the captain and the greediness of the crew. The pay-off was certainly not a matter of every man for himself and there are indications that it proceeded in an orderly fashion. When the *Golden Lion* of Lübeck was captured in 1607, one of the pirates named Morgan was made 'purse bearer, and the money was brought unto him by the company as they receaved yt'.¹³

A pirate's most prized possession was his ship. It clearly carried a great deal of prestige, particularly in the eyes of other pirates, and the captain who commanded a poor vessel ran the risk of being deserted by his crew. In 1604, Bishop and his men were at Sallee in the *Blessing*, recovering from a fight with a Spanish warship, when John Ward sailed into port, whereupon Bishop's men, 'seeing the said Warde and companie to be well shipped and full of monie lefte the Blessinge and went into Captaine Ward's shippe'.¹⁴

Pirates had the choice of whatever ships they could capture. In practice this usually meant merchant vessels which could then be adapted to suit their own purposes. Often they re-christened their men-of-war (as they liked to call them) with such appropriate names as the *Gift*, the *Ambition*, the *Why Not I?* or the *Mamora*. Pirate ships could often keep the seas for many months at a time, since they simply helped themselves to provisions and equipment from vessels which they chanced to meet at sea. Even if a merchantman was not carrying a rich cargo the pirates could still rob her of victuals, drink, cables, sails, arms, ordnance, powder, shot and anything else that they needed, as well as goods that took their fancy, such as the clothes and personal possessions of the crew.

Pirates had a seaman's eye for a good vessel. The main qualities they looked for were speed, sturdiness (pirate vessels often had to mount large numbers of heavy guns), stability in rough seas, a shallow draught for inshore work and, of course, general seaworthiness. The type of vessel which came closest to fulfilling all these criteria was the Dutch *fluyt* or flyboat. Mainwaring appreciatively noted that Flemish bottoms 'go well, are roomy ships, floaty, and of small charge'.

The flyboat was the most successful carrying vessel of the day and soon became outstandingly popular, especially for use in the bulk trades of northern Europe. Introduced in the 1590s flyboats were launched in great numbers during the twelve-year truce between Holland and Spain (1609–21). To all appearances the flyboat was a very businesslike trader. It was a single-decked, shallow-draught vessel with three masts, square-rigged and designed to be handled by a small crew. Flyboats had no figure-heads, a minimum of decoration and had few or no gun-ports. In certain respects they represented a new departure in ship-building design. At the start of the seventeenth century many ships were still basically 'round' vessels with lofty upperworks, which made them cumbersome and unstable in rough seas. In contrast, the flyboat was a long ship (its length measuring anything from four to six times its width) and this, together with the absence of any lofty structures fore and aft, gave the ship very desirable sailing properties.

The qualities which contributed to the success of the flyboat as a trader have, perhaps, served to obscure its suitability as a 'man-of-war' – one authority even went so far as to describe it as being 'about as warlike as a coal-scuttle'.¹⁵ In fact the reverse was true; the flyboat was a very fast vessel indeed. For example, the master of one London merchantman described how the 250-ton flyboat of Captain Hughs, mounting twenty-eight cannon and six fowling pieces, 'sayleth from us with halfe their sayles'.¹⁶ Or again, in 1609, a squadron of ships was sent out from Madeira to give chase to Captain Francke's Flemish man-of-war, only to find that the pirates 'made no reckoning of them, beinge verie swifte of saile'.¹⁷

The structural strength of flyboats and their bulk-carrying capacity were also of great importance to pirates. The space below decks could accommodate a considerable number of men – there were usually at least fifty and sometimes more than a hundred in a pirate crew – while the ship was designed to be handled by only a few men in the normal course of trade, which left most pirates a free hand when going into battle. The sturdy build of the hull enabled the ship to carry the added weight of extra ordnance that was common among pirate vessels. Many pirate ships carried between twenty and thirty cannon, which had usually been acquired from captured merchantmen. Their fire-power was thus far greater than that of normal trading vessels and on a par with heavily-armed merchantmen which went on naval expeditions during the period. Ward's flyboat mounted 32 cast guns and was manned by 100 men, while Stephenson's *Prong* and Hussey's *Black Raven* were both of 200 tons, mounted 28 guns, and were crewed by 50 men. Robinson's *Bull, Bear and Horse* was armed with 4 brass cannon, 15 iron pieces and 5 or 6 'murderers'. And none of the merchantmen employed in the naval expedition against Algiers (1620) was greater than 300 tons burden or carried more than 26 iron guns.

Pirates were expert at adapting merchantmen for a more war-like role. One interesting account has survived of conversion work which was carried out on the *Flying Cow* of Amsterdam by Robert Russel, ship's carpenter with Captain Robert Stephenson, who:

. . . caused xx portes to be cutt out, having but foure before, and made her a sparre decke abaste the maine mast, and newe gratinges round about withinborde, and rayled her round about, and also made her a newe misen maste, and new repayred her and furnished her with sayles, rigging and other necessities to his great chardges . . .¹⁸

The size of the vessel favoured by pirates was not large – most of their flyboats were in the region of 160–250 tons burden. The effectiveness of a pirate ship did not depend on its size. Small vessels were often swifter and more manoeuvrable than ships of greater tonnage. For example, the *Phoenix*, Captain Saxbridge's ship, was only 35 tons burden, yet she was evidently a very useful craft. She had made voyages to Guinea and the West Indies and was described as 'a longe shippe her burthen considered . . . draweth little water and hath good rome for stowidge of men'.¹⁹

A ship which remained at sea for any length of time would eventually begin to 'grow foul', that is to say that barnacles and other deposits would build up on the hull, impairing sailing qualities and eventually destroying the timbers. To maintain their ships in good order, pirates needed to careen or grave them regularly. Such operations had to be carried out speedily and in secret, for at such times the pirates were exposed to attack by land and sea. By necessity they were expert at such work. John Jennings managed to grave his ship at Mevagissey in only twenty-four hours and was back at sea again before anyone realised what had happened. Occasionally things went wrong and the rovers were caught with their ships' bottoms up, which is what befell Lambert Bastfield, the Liverpoolian pirate captain, who was surprised by Dutch warships while gravating his vessel in a remote bay in Ireland.

Speed and convenience of careening was another reason that pirates preferred vessels of more modest size. The lighter a vessel was, the easier it was to haul it on its side and careen it. With ships of greater burden – say over 500 tons – careening was difficult, if not impossible, and for really effective repairs a dry dock was necessary. Pirates, of course, had no dry docks. They are known to have taken prizes as big as 500 tons,

but do not seem to have used these ships as their men-of-war.

Another practical reason why the Atlantic pirates in particular needed small ships, was because the bar at the entrance to Mamora, their main retreat, did not permit passage to ships of more than about 300 tons burden.

Contemporaries were at pains to portray pirates as a desperate rabble held together only by a common lust for riches. John Smith's description of them as 'riotous, quarrelous, treacherous, blasphemous and villanous' was reassuring for more law-abiding seamen, for it showed pirates as disorganised and dis-united and therefore presenting less of a threat than they really did. This was also the impression given by Admiral Monson in his *Naval Tracts*, in which he describes an alliance between two English pirates, Thomas Tucker and John Woodland, *alias* Monnocho. These two had planned a voyage of plunder to the 'Seven Islands' of Russia, but had only sailed as far as the Faroes when Tucker's ship was wrecked in a storm. Woodland turned the misfortune to his own favour and robbed Tucker, having 'no more pity of him than of a Spaniard, who were most obnoxious to pirates in those days'. From this incident, Monson was able to draw the comforting moral that there was no honour or trust between pirates; that 'the condition of such people is never to be constant or honest longer than their devilish humours hold'.

Pirates, of course, often did conform to this picture of treachery and deceit. There was certainly no love lost between the anti-Spanish pirates of the Atlantic, who were well disposed towards English shipping, and those of the Mediterranean who renounced their country and their religion and who treated English vessels no differently from those of any other nation. In 1608 the news was out that 'there ys great hatred betwixt Ward and theym [Bishop, Jennings and other pirates operating in the Atlantic], and nothing but death will appease theyr quarrell yf they chance to meete one with the other'.²⁰

Both of these groups had their fair share of internal conflict. For example, thirty of Ward's followers escaped with one of his prizes in 1606, and a few years later another group of mal-

contents deserted him and offered their services to the Maltese. In the Atlantic, Peter Easton's career began in earnest after he had quarrelled with Captain Richard Robinson and made off in one of his prizes. Easton, in his turn, inspired little devotion from his own men. While he was on the American coast in 1612, several hundred of his followers deserted, and he also had trouble keeping order in his band – at one time two of his chief officers fell out and had to be put in separate ships to keep them apart.

One of the most frequent causes of conflict amongst pirates was the division of spoils. Captain Robinson's crew once carried his ship to sea because they feared that their captain and a few intimates were planning to cheat them out of their fair share of the plunder. Disagreements between officers and ordinary members of the crew over how to apportion the loot were probably a major bone of contention. Captain John Johnson was so scared of his own men, who believed that he had cheated them, that he locked up their muskets in the bread-room of his ship.

Anyone familiar with the novels of Robert Louis Stevenson would expect pirate behaviour to be characterised by treachery, desertion and squabbling. However, during the early part of the seventeenth century it is also possible to observe a remarkable degree of harmony amongst English pirates, and especially amongst those operating in Atlantic waters.

The pirates of the Atlantic were moulded into what can loosely be termed 'a pirate confederation'. Within this confederation at any one time there might be as many as thirty to forty ships and a thousand or so men. Overall control was in the hands of an 'admiral' and other prominent leaders were glorified with such titles as 'vice-admiral' and 'rear-admiral'. The whole command structure was fairly informal and had arisen to a large extent as a result of patronage. When a captain took a prize, he would man her with some of his own crew and place one of his most trusted men in command. This man would then, in effect, become captain of his own ship and, if he took any prizes, would be expected to repay his old captain's generosity. Francke, for example, was given his first command by Robert Stephenson, and soon repayed his debt by handing one of his prizes over to

Stephenson, who rated her so highly that he made her his new man-of-war. New commanders were sometimes appointed on a percentage basis of prize money. For example, Captains Millington and Walker both handed their loot to William Bauge, in return for which they were to receive a third of the total value of all booty captured by the consortium.

Not all captains were so generous in giving prizes to underlings and captured ships were often used as pinnaces, for sighting prizes and giving assistance in battle. More suspicious captains even restricted the food allowance of men aboard these consorts, so that they would not be tempted to go off and try their luck on their own.

Pirates appear often to have elected their leaders democratically. Some captains are known to have been chosen by their crew and Richard Bishop was reported to have been 'elected' as supreme commander of the pirate confederation. Without the support of his crew a pirate captain must have been very insecure. Neither were the decisions of an unsuccessful leader likely to go unchallenged for long. For example, in 1607, Captain Owen, brother-in-law to Sir Richard Hawkins, vice-admiral of Devon, left Plymouth to go on the account. It was not long, however, before his crew of eighty mutinied and elected another captain.

The men themselves appear to have been fairly free to come and go as they pleased and probably drifted from ship to ship. One man was known to have been steward to Jennings, Easton and Francke. Bishop, as admiral, actually assigned men to specific ships and if captains were in need of men – particularly specialists such as carpenters or surgeons – they could borrow them from other pirate ships. The mobility of men within the fleet no doubt not only depended on the relationships between individual captains and the needs of the moment, but also on the wishes of the men themselves.

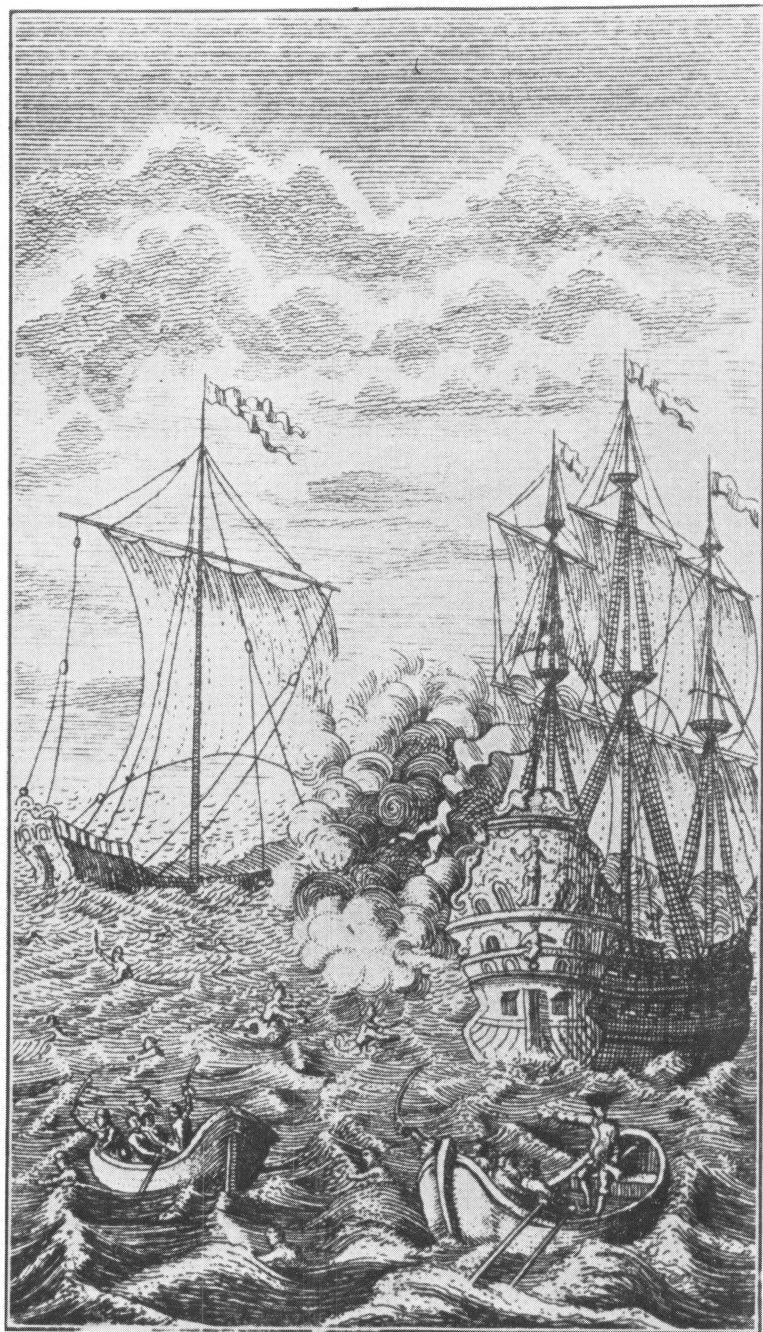
Ships and goods were continually changing hands in the fleet and this necessitated some general acceptance of ownership and credit. In 1610, Captain Parker sold a three-quarter share in his ship, the *Black Raven*, to Thomas Hussey, who then assumed the captaincy. Hussey died early the following year in a touching

scene in his cabin, surrounded by all the captains of the fleet, in whose presence he left his ship and all his goods to William Hughs, his lieutenant – a fact which was generally acknowledged throughout the pirate band. Pirates had a regard for one another's possessions which would have satisfied the most meticulous lawyer. On the death of Captain Peters, it was reported that he had 'made Captain Myagh his executer and lefte him his shippe and goods', worth in excess of £6,000.²¹ Goods may have been come by unlawfully, but the right of ownership amongst pirates was often scrupulously defined.

In some respects the Atlantic pirates exhibited some of the camaraderie which was to characterise the 'Brotherhood of the Coast' in the West Indies in the latter half of the century. No doubt their organisation was unsophisticated compared with that of the buccaneers – no indications have been found of any formal code dealing with details such as penalties for stealing from shipmates, or indemnity for specific injuries sustained in battle – but there are signs of a system of punishment reminiscent of that of the buccaneers. On one occasion Captain Baughe was intent on executing one of his men, George Lea, who had assaulted him, but Baughe's crew refused to allow their captain to have his way and instead Lea was towed to the mouth of the pirates' harbour in a rowing boat with one oar and some water, and was formally cast out from the pirate community.

Some captains may have devised codes of behaviour that were not altogether welcomed by rough seafarers. For example, one pirate crew had a man on board whom they called 'thair parsones, for saying of prayeris to thame twyse a day'²² – an early glimpse of the kind of rigid sabbatarianism that was to be enforced by the notorious Bartholomew Roberts more than a century later.

Although pirate ships often congregated in great strength in their own harbours, once at sea they usually hunted in twos and threes. In this way they had more chance of surprising their prey. They could also spread their net wider and, if their luck was in, shares would be that much larger. If merchants had been faced with the threat of a large band of pirates cutting trade routes, their ships would not have put to sea at all (as happened



Catching a Tartar: a pirate attack is roughly handled by Spaniards in the western Mediterranean

A
TRUE AND
CERTAINE RE-
port of the Beginning, Proceedings,
Ouerthrowes, and now present Estate of Cap-
taine WARD and DANSEKER, the two late
famous Pirates : from their first setting
foorth to this present time.

AS ALSO

The firing of 25. Saile of the *Tunis*, men of
warre : Together with the death of diuers
of WARDs chiefe Captaines.

Published by *Andrew Barker* Master of a Ship,
who was taken by the Confederates of *Ward*,
and by them some time detain-
ed Prisoner.



LONDON,

Printed by *William Hall*, and are to be sold
by *John Helme* at his shop in *S. Dunstons*
Church-yard. 1609.

Establishment propaganda. Title page of the catalogue of misdeeds committed by the pirates Ward and Danseker, published in 1609

in 1609 when losses in the Mediterranean were so heavy that English trade to the Straits was brought to a standstill). Furthermore, the existence of a large number of pirate ships would only have invited strong naval retaliation – something which was unlikely so long as there was no single worthwhile 'objective'.

On their own, the strongest pirate ships were a match for all but naval vessels and the best merchantmen – East Indiamen and ships of the Spanish Plate Fleet. On one occasion Easton fired a small French warship and engaged a larger one (although he failed to take her), and Mainwaring, with only two or three vessels, 'put off' four or five ships of the Spanish navy, forcing them to take refuge in Lisbon, after a hard engagement that lasted throughout Midsummer's Day 1615.

Faced with a common enemy, the rovers were quick to unite or give assistance to one another. When Captain Williamson, commander of a royal ship, opened fire on Saxbridge's pirate vessel at Baltimore, he soon had reason to regret his action, for the pirate ships of Jennings and Easton sailed menacingly up to his ship and forced him to break off the action. The English were also ready to combine to meet threats from foreign rovers. In 1610 Dutch pirates seized Baughe's ship and goods and later that year they also robbed Francke and cruelly tortured him and his men. As a result of these incidents five English captains banded together to seek revenge. They engaged the Dutch rovers at Mamora and a fierce battle ensued lasting three days. Three English captains (Hussey, Plumley and Parker) were slain, but the Dutch suffered even heavier losses and were finally defeated.²³

The unity and strength which appears amongst pirates at this time is difficult to explain. Probably it owes something to the fact that many of the rovers saw their depredations in a patriotic light, continuing the war against the natural enemy, Spain. Certainly many of them gave preferential treatment to English vessels which fell into their hands. Their cohesion may also owe something to the fact that they were all outlaws from England, living in a practically self-contained community, who were drawn into one another's company for safety and companionship.

Pirates had their own ports where they congregated in strength and were able to indulge their tastes to a greater or lesser extent, depending on their relations with the local inhabitants. Various ports such as Tunis, Algiers, Leghorn and Villefranche all tolerated English pirates at one time or another, but pirates could expect to find an equally warm welcome in remote coastal settlements in Ireland, Africa or even in England. The population in such areas was only too willing to relieve the monotony of everyday existence by entertaining rovers, particularly if they had money to spend and tales to tell. Even sailors of English trading vessels who encountered pirates in foreign harbours were often quite prepared to exchange gifts or 'make merry' with them.

When describing the kind of lives which pirates led, it is important to remember that they were not a race apart. Many began as ordinary seamen and drifted in and out of piracy, returning to England to visit their friends and relatives, or taking spells of legitimate employment. There was probably little to choose between a seamen's tavern in London or Plymouth and a drinking house in Leamcon or Mamora. Pirates differed from most seafarers only in that they were perhaps more reckless and adventurous and had more time and money to indulge themselves.

One of the most attractive qualities of pirates was their arrogance and gall. In an age when many men believed in the Divine Right of Kings, it is refreshing to see Sockwell proclaim himself 'King of Lundy' or to hear Easton demanding why he should accept a royal pardon when he was king in his own domain. In a contemporary ballad, John Ward says of King James: 'If he reign king of all the land, I will reign king at sea'.²⁴

The appearance of these 'pirate kings' is sketchy, but no doubt they were impressive in a crude kind of way. Pierce, a captain in the Mediterranean, was said to be a fearsome man with an 'angry countenance',²⁵ and Easton's appearance was described as 'rude and savadge'.²⁶ No doubt sheer physical strength was a great attribute for a pirate leader. Captain Alexander Vaughan was 'a greate and tall bigge thick man'²⁷ and Captain Woolworth was 'a tall man, and well set, and hath

a blacke head and bearde, and weareth a longe locke on one side of his head'.²⁸

What many pirates lacked in stature they could make up for in their dress. These early English pirates, like Blackbeard later on, often cultivated their own individual image. John Exton, for example, was well known because he always dressed entirely in green, and 'Black Will' got his name from his black hair and apparel. Such extroverts might be expected to have made the most of the clothes and ornaments that came their way. Kit Oloard must have made a spectacular picture, 'dressed in black velvet trousers and jacket, crimson silk socks, black felt hat, brown beard, and shirt collar embroidered in black silk'.²⁹ Pirate wardrobes might contain clothes, jewellery and other ornaments whose origin was European, African, Mediterranean or even Eastern. Many renegades adopted Arabic dress, such as Sir Francis Verney, whose turban, pelisses and curly-toed slippers were returned to England on his death. Ward was said to 'live like a bashaw in Barbary' and he and his followers abandoned the English fashion for long beards and either clipped their beards very short or went clean-shaven. In an age which was famous for extravagance in dress, pirates were amongst the most colourful – if not always the most tasteful – of dressers.

The rigours of shipboard life made pirates willing to take whatever opportunities for entertainment came their way. Gambling was probably common both at sea and on shore. Backgammon (or 'tables' as it was then called), was popular in pirate circles and dice was also a common gambling game. After John Johnson and his men plundered the *Black Buck* of Enkhuizen, Philip Smith won 680 out of a total haul of 800 silver dollars playing dice with his shipmates. Cards must also have been a popular way to while away time and money, and packs of playing cards were in demand at Mamora.

Music must have provided welcome relaxation, but there is scarcely any indication of what form it took or what songs the pirates sang. Perhaps they sang about one another's exploits – at least one ballad about John Ward survives, although it is not known whether it was popular with pirates. Probably they

sang well-known songs of the day and maybe their repertoire included foreign ditties which they had acquired on their travels or learnt from captives (not a few English pirates were multi-lingual). The importance attached to music is suggested by one unique reference to musical diversions aboard a pirate ship. Captain Stephenson, who was 'daunceinge on boarde the Phillip Bonaventure in Mamora harbor', commanded Baptista Ingle, a member of another pirate crew, to 'winde his whistle'. Ingle accordingly played a tune for the dancing captain, who was so delighted with his playing that he refused to let him leave the ship.

Pirates spent a great deal of time drinking. Prolonged drinking bouts were an almost mandatory way of celebrating a successful cruise – from Ward and his men running drunk through the streets of Tunis, to Captain Robinson and his crew celebrating at Baltimore in 'most riotous manner'.³⁰ Drinking was frequently taken to excess. One man testified that when he was at Mamora the pirates paid him forty ducats, because 'he attended uppon them, and did many base offices for them when they were druncke and disordered themselves'.³¹ Pirates at Mamora also took opium, which was brought to them by merchants who came there to trade. Yet they seem to have reserved their riotous behaviour and debauchery for when they came ashore and neither drink nor drugs appear to have been detrimental to their effectiveness at sea.

After months cooped up aboard ship, women were in great demand. Prostitutes were ferried from all over Britain to Ireland, where they did brisk business, and not a few men must have contracted the same disease as Nicholas Thompson, who was 'very ill of burneing by whoores'.³² Women captured at sea could expect little mercy from pirates. In May 1623 John Nutt and his crew stopped a bark at the entrance to Dungarvan harbour which was carrying a dozen or more women, all of whom 'were ravished by the pyrates' company'. Mrs Jones, the wife of a Cork saddler, particularly took the fancy of the pirate captain, who carried her to his cabin 'and there had her a week'.³³ Pirates, however, do not appear to have taken females to sea with them. Presumably their presence was considered too dis-

tracting, although captains may sometimes have stretched the rules to suit their own convenience. One of the more interesting crew members aboard Captain Barry's ship when it anchored at Berehaven was a negro wench.

Many pirates were family men who did their best to maintain their dependants while they were overseas. Some moved their families so they would be able to see more of them; the wives of some English rovers settled in Munster and others, whose husbands held Dutch commissions, moved to Holland. It was common practice for pirates to send money home to their families by means of English ships which they met at sea. For example, John Ward and Anthony Johnson entrusted the master of the *Husband* with £200 in Barbary gold to deliver to their wives. Such gifts were clearly illegal, but the womenfolk of pirates expected them as of right. On one occasion the marshal of the admiralty court was accosted by some irate wives who had not received the gold which their pirate husbands had sent them.

Pirates, like other seamen, were in a good position to have more than one wife. Ward had a wife in Tunis and a wife in England, and William Pierce, the son of a rich Plymouth man, was married to a Turkish girl. Michael Powel kept two wives in England, one at Ratcliffe and the other at Plymouth, which was perhaps why he stayed at Tunis for so long. Probably pirates' families suffered no more than those of other seamen, particularly if some provision was made for them. Richard Robinson gave £160 to his brother to invest for his two children and the interest was sent regularly to his wife at Plymouth. Even if a pirate's wife and children were deserted, this was no worse than the fate of many other seamen's wives. At least piracy carried no social stigma and a pirate's family were just as likely to receive help as to be victimised.

The rewards of piracy could be fantastic. Easton retired to Savoy with a fortune that was conservatively valued at 100,000 crowns, received a pension of £4,000 a year, built himself a palace and lived the life of an Italian courtier. Ward's wealth was probably even greater; one of his prizes alone, the *Soderina*, was sold for 70,000 crowns. Such riches enabled Ward to live at

Tunis in the style of an oriental potentate, in a 'faire Palace beautified with rich Marble and Alabaster Stones'.³⁴

Ward and Easton were unquestionably the most successful pirates of their day, but many other captains amassed wealth which, by contemporary standards, amounted to a fortune. When John Jennings surrendered to the Earl of Thomond, his 300-ton vessel contained 150 chests of sugar, thirty-six cases of cinnamon and twelve packs of pepper. Among his personal possessions were pearls, clusters of rubies and diamonds, Spanish silver, £40 in doubloons and a waistband quilted with over £400 of Barbary gold – and all this besides £2,000 worth of merchandise which he had deposited elsewhere. Four-figure fortunes were not exceptional amongst pirate captains and such wealth could be gained by the capture of one rich prize.

Some pirates managed to smuggle their booty into England. One man who came ashore with jewels concealed about his person was foolish enough to boast that his breeches were as rich as the lord admiral's. Captain Thomas Tompkins brought home £2,600 in silver (his share of the capture of the *Black Albiana* of Venice), and when he was finally recognised and arrested some seven years afterwards, claimed that he had given 1,000 marks to his brother to procure a pardon. Thomas Sockwell said he had offered as much as £20,000 for a pardon, and although such a sum may seem incredible, the king himself told the Venetian ambassador that he had received an offer of £40,000 for a pardon from a pirate. Sockwell had apparently got his money from the capture of a carvel near the Azores which he had sold at Mamora for £40,000. Whether or not his wealth was as great as he pretended, Sockwell was evidently very rich, for he was travelling the country wearing two gilded waistcoats full of gold and carrying a 'cloak bag' which contained two or three thousand pounds in cash.

Some pirates were able to enjoy their ill-gotten gains in safe retirement. Under the terms of the general pardon of 1612, pirates who surrendered were allowed to keep all their loot. One of these pirates, Captain Bauge, whose ship and goods were confiscated by the naval captain Sir William St John, actually sued St John for the recovery of his booty – apparently success-

fully, for a note dated March 1616 specifies payments made to the pirate since December 1613 in part payment of a sum of £2,586. Bishop also had a prosperous retirement. It is not clear whether his pardon permitted him to retain all of his plunder, which must have been considerable (his share of the *Margaret* of Morbihan alone amounted to £1,000), but he was clearly not hard up, for he settled at Leamcon and built a house there 'after the English fation'.³⁵

The captain and principal officers invariably took the lion's share of the loot – anything from a third to a half of the total. The rest was distributed amongst the ordinary crew members and shares were not spectacular. For example, on a prize realising £2,000 there might be £1,000 left after the captain and his henchmen had taken their cut. Assuming there were a hundred men in the crew, each man's share would be only £10. For the capture of *Our Lady of the Conception*, a ship laden with Brazil wood and spices worth about £3,500, the crew received only £10 a man. Thomas Mitton, who was at the capture of the *Soderina*, had £60 as his share; very few pirate hands ever got more from a single prize. Even so, piracy paid far better than legitimate employment. Sailors on merchantmen could not expect much more than £10 a year, whereas a pirate could hope to make as much from one prize and, in addition, the pirate could also look forward to clothes, weapons and other possessions that he could pillage from the crews of captured ships.

Of course, the unsuccessful pirate got nothing and many soon dissipated what little they had. Four years after Mainwaring's crew had received an English pardon, they were reported to be in 'a wretched condition'.³⁶ Easton's men, on the other hand, were reduced to poverty by the treachery of their leaders. Only a month after their surrender at Villefranche, the English agent in Savoy reported that Easton 'hath quitted most part of his company and (for good example I thinke) sent them begging homewards: himself and the rest heere are gallant in variety of clothes and colours'.³⁷

It may have been difficult for an ex-pirate to get a job at sea again. Thomas Tucker, who sailed with Easton and who received an English pardon in 1616, found difficulty in getting a

berth, 'his credit being lost, which made him unfit for employment'. Yet such recognition was perhaps exceptional and Tucker eventually managed to find a job.³⁸ On the whole, it seems unlikely that the law-abiding seaman was in any better position than the impoverished pirate.

Therefore, with a few brilliant exceptions, the majority of pirates failed to make their fortunes. Most of them, however, spent only a few years in piracy and never suffered for their crimes. They cannot be described as failures, since being a seaman in seventeenth-century England meant being doomed to a miserable life in any case. There is a danger of over-reacting against the popular romantic image of piracy. Pirates were not all squalid thieves who ended up penniless and dissolute. Many brought considerable flair to their trade. Certainly there was a profusion of all the vices normally associated with piracy – drunkenness, whoring, gambling, fighting, torture and general debauchery – but pirates did not have a monopoly of such things. What is surprising are the qualities of order and organisation which existed, especially amongst the pirates of the Atlantic, and the moderation which English pirates often exercised in committing their spoils. This was, perhaps, one of the main reasons that they were able to defy capture by all nations and to maintain their power at sea for as long as they did.

2

Pirate Hunting Grounds

No man is a pirate unless his contemporaries agree to call him so.
– Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in *Table Talk*

English pirates became established in two main areas – the Mediterranean and the North Atlantic. Although there were some points of contact between those operating in the two seas, they were essentially separate from one another.

The main centre for English pirates in the Mediterranean was Tunis, although some also worked from Algiers. They were especially active in the eastern Mediterranean, and preyed on the shipping of all christian nations without exception. Gradually their operations became increasingly subject to Turkish control, and many of them eventually entered service with the Turks.

The pirates of the North Atlantic were a different breed of men. They enjoyed greater independence than their counterparts in the Mediterranean and operated from bases in Morocco and southern Ireland, over which they exercised virtual control. Many of these rovers acted as though the Elizabethan war had never ended, concentrating their attacks against the Spaniards, and showing favour to British vessels which fell into their hands.

Because of their dissimilarities, these two groups of pirates were seen in very different lights by contemporaries at home. The renegades of the Mediterranean were regarded as the more fascinating and evil. They had turned their backs forever on their country and their religion and, if they had not actually ‘turned Turk’, they had certainly added to the miseries and sufferings of countless christian slaves in the bagnios of the Turkish regencies. By comparison, the crimes of the Atlantic rovers were venial, since most of them had confined their depredations to foreign shipping. These essential differences were recognised by the pirates themselves and helped to create some feeling of hostility between the two groups.

Acts of piracy were not, of course, restricted to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Depredations by the English were reported at various times in most parts of the globe. In 1612, the wisdom of sending an embassy to Persia was questioned, because it was said that English ships and sailors 'so often turn pirates in remote countries'.¹ The events of the following year lend some substance to this view, for English and Flemish berrons were marauding in the Red Sea and the Turks were reported to be constructing galleys to meet the threat. The West Indies and Spanish America held a special attraction for would-be pirates and were the scene of several outrages, as for example when several of the captains on Sir Walter Raleigh's expedition to the Orinoco in 1618 deserted to become pirates. The waters of the East Indies (in the seventeenth century the name was often used to mean all land east of Africa) also provided a promising hunting-ground. In 1615, for example, Sir John Fearne and a band of Englishmen were at Brest, preparing for an East Indies voyage. They carried the king of France's commission to trade in the area, but it was generally supposed that 'their chieftest end and ayme is to committ some piracy or outrage at sea in those partes'.²

There was, however, considerable confusion over what actually constituted piracy in these distant seas. In 1494, the Spanish and Portuguese had agreed, in a magnificently arrogant gesture, to divide the New World (then largely undiscovered) between themselves, and to exclude all other nations from going west of an imaginary north-south line drawn through the Azores. This agreement was sanctioned by the pope by an instrument called a 'Bull of Donation'. It may have had some significance in 1494, when all the maritime powers of northern Europe were Catholic, but it was hardly relevant in the seventeenth century, particularly when countries such as England and Holland no longer recognised the pope's authority. The Spanish, however, clung tenaciously to their grandiose claims and denounced all interlopers who ventured 'beyond the line' as *piratas*, while England and the other maritime nations ignored Spanish claims and continued their voyages of exploration and discovery regardless.

Thus, piracy beyond the line defied definition, or was at best susceptible to many differing interpretations. Nor can depredations in the disputed seas be treated as piracy in the strict sense, because most of the ships which perpetrated the outrages were not pirate ships proper, but traders and merchantmen which combined business with plunder. Given the conditions of undeclared war existing beyond the line, governments were understandably reluctant to condemn their errant seamen as pirates.

Therefore, while piracy in European waters was well-defined and laws were enforced with a considerable degree of international co-operation, beyond the line nothing was certain – except the rule of force. It was generally accepted that spoils which would have been piracy east of the Azores could be easily justified if committed west of the islands. In 1605, Sir Ferdinando Gorges wrote to the Earl of Salisbury suggesting measures to curb piracy in European waters, but he specifically advised against taking similar action to curb depredations west of the Azores and the Canaries,

For beyond those Isles it is not known that his Majesty has league or alliance neither may his subjects trade with any of those people but at their hazard and extreme adventure, and therefore those the less to be excepted against for their enterprises.³

During the first part of the seventeenth century English pirates were mainly active in the waters east of the Azores. Occasionally they visited the eastern seaboard of North America and sometimes even strayed as far south as the West Indies, but for the most part they took their plunder off the western seaboard of Europe. This made sense, for they not only avoided the dangerous conditions prevailing in the disputed seas, but were still well placed to intercept trans-oceanic as well as European commerce. It is therefore the operations of English pirates in two areas, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, which form the focal point of piracy during the period with which this book is concerned.

Apart from these 'deep-sea' pirates, there were other scavengers

active nearer home. Many ships and small boats were captured or plundered near the British coast in the first half of the seventeenth century. Some of the more ambitious robbers saw such spoils as an opportunity to increase their strength in order to graduate to piracy on the high seas, but most were content to seize whatever they could and get back safely to the shore. Coastal and river piracy could be a lucrative business, and although the prizes might be smaller than those captured on the high seas, fewer men were needed and the loot could be disposed of quickly on the British market. This type of piracy will be studied in one area where it was rife – in the Thames and its estuary.

Not only the seafaring population were piratically inclined; given the opportunity, most men were willing to assist pirates and traffic with them. There were two main ways in which pirates could dispose of their booty; they could either sell it abroad (usually to the Jews or Moors of North Africa who then resold it to christian merchants), or they could bring it back to Britain and dispose of it direct – and practically everyone was interested in trading with them, including admiralty men and other officials who were supposed to clamp down on such illegal trade. The areas which gave most encouragement to pirates were the south-west of England and southern Ireland, where the activities of 'land pirates' caused the government of the day considerable concern.

The period covered by this book is short – less than forty years – but during this time piracy achieved a surprising degree of prominence, and there were developments which are of great significance in the history of piracy. Pirates, like moths, often enjoyed short and colourful lives and by 1640 the vigour of English piracy was temporarily exhausted. Yet during the previous forty years English pirates had attained a position of unprecedented strength and left a legacy which was inherited by the buccaneers of the West Indies and by the corsairs of Barbary.

Little was written about the exploits of these men at the time – no more than a few plays and pamphlets and several songs. In a way this is a tribute to their success, since only the most foolish or arrogant of criminals seeks or desires any kind of publicity.

Of the thousands of English pirates active during these years, the names of perhaps no more than five are known today, and then only to specialised naval historians or to students of piracy. There was no Exquemelin to write a history of the pirates of the early seventeenth century; no Daniel Defoe to visit them in prison to record and popularise their misdeeds.

The only way to gain a full picture of piracy for this period has been to use contemporary manuscript sources, and in particular the records of the High Court of Admiralty, in whose pages the testimonies and fates of many of the pirates are still preserved. By the study of these and other sources it has been possible to build up a vivid account of English piracy as it existed in the first forty years of the seventeenth century, to trace significant changes and developments, to assess its importance, to advance reasons for its decline, and to try to place it in some relationship to the periods of piracy which preceded and succeeded it. Fortunately, the court records contain an abundance of colourful detail which also sheds much light on the private lives of many of these early English adventurers.

3

The Confederation of Deep-Sea Pirates

Though Out-laws, we keep laws amongst our selves,
else we could have no certain government.

– Purser the pirate, *Fortune by Land and Sea*, Act IV Sc 1

The long drawn-out Elizabethan war with Spain marked England's coming of age as a great maritime nation. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Atlantic, where the great struggle between the two countries was mainly fought out. The type of shipping that was to be found in the ocean in the late sixteenth century was considerable both in number and variety. There were rich Brazilmen making for port with cargoes of Campeachy wood and hides, vessels coming from Madeira, the Azores and the Canaries laden with sugar, succates and wines, and, richest of all (but least obtainable), the treasure ships: strong galleons bringing silver from the mines of the New World and fabulous spices from the Far East which had been transhipped from the Pacific. In addition to these exotic ships there were the numerous coasting vessels of European trade: Spanish and Portuguese barques sailing north with the produce of the Iberian peninsula, or northern interlopers sailing south to supply the hard-pressed Spaniards with much-needed commodities such as fish and grain.

It was the promise of such prizes that prompted English privateers to range the ocean in search of plunder. It has been estimated that during any one of the war years (1585–1603) there were never less than a hundred sail of English picaroons on the Spanish coast. The end result of this concentration of activity was that when peace finally came in 1604 there was a new generation of English seamen, hardened by almost two decades of war, who had first-hand experience of the Atlantic.

The war also helped to familiarise English seamen with new bases. Privateers who exceeded their commissions had to find ports of call where their 'prize goods' could be quietly disposed of without any reference to the legality of their capture. In the south the Turkish and Moorish ports of North Africa were ideal for this purpose, while closer to home the wild, indented coastline of Ireland provided ample opportunity for disposing of goods which might have caused embarrassment in England. Ireland had long been a haven for rovers whose land-based connections had posed problems for Tudor governments. The use of North African ports was comparatively recent, but during the latter stages of the war the 'Barbary connection' became so common for the disposal of booty that the situation was effectively beyond all government control.

It was therefore only natural that when the war ended the pirates of James's reign should have turned to bases in Ireland and Morocco from which to launch their attacks on Atlantic shipping. However, in practice their operations soon assumed a very different character from those of the Elizabethan rovers. In the first place the pirates, ensconced in their remote havens, were completely beyond the arm of governments, a law unto themselves. Their independence was underlined by their strength and organisation. Although relations within the pirate fleet were not always harmonious, bands of a thousand or more men and ten or more ships were not uncommon. Under a succession of able leaders they ranged the length and breadth of the ocean, from the European littoral to Newfoundland and from the west coast of Africa to Iceland. They took prizes wherever and whenever the opportunity arose, not confining their depredations to the coasts, but attacking ships on the high seas hundreds of miles from land.

Although they were mainly English, many pirate crews had a cosmopolitan character and included Dutchmen, Frenchmen, Moors and even negroes amongst their number. It was probably the first time that out-and-out pirates had enjoyed such strength, independence and unity of action – certainly in the waters of north-west Europe. In many ways the changed character of Jacobean piracy can be said to mark the transitional stage be-

tween the commercial, coastal piracy of sixteenth-century England and the rise of the buccaneers in the West Indies in the latter half of the seventeenth century.

After the war the English pirates soon established themselves at Mamora, a port on the Atlantic coast of Morocco at the mouth of the West Sebou River, not far from the infamous Moorish pirate city of Salée. A southern base of operations was of obvious importance if the pirates were to operate off the Spanish coast, close to the main routes of trans-oceanic trade. Occasionally they made use of other towns on the coast, such as Safi, Santa Cruz and Mogador, but these were no more than open roadsteads offering no security for their ships, while the other ports on the Moroccan coast were all firmly under the control of either the Spanish or the Moors.

The King of Morocco was not unduly disturbed by the presence of a pirate enclave in his dominions. After all, the pirates provided a continual source of irritation for Spain, Morocco's traditional enemy. The pirates' depredations also gave other nations cause for concern, but the King was not prepared to take up arms to drive them out. Indeed, on one occasion when some Dutch men-of-war chased an English pirate ship into Safi, Mouley Zidan, the King of Morocco, arrested the Dutch seamen who had dared to pursue the pirates on land and imprisoned the Dutch agent in Morocco by way of retaliation. The tolerant and even hospitable way in which the Moors treated the pirates is hardly surprising, for piracy brought wealth to a poor, remote country as well as providing a source of ordnance and much-needed foodstuffs. The Moors sometimes used the pirates' ships as transport for their troops and the English would have taught them something of their skills in sailing and gunnery, just as they did the Turks of North Africa.

Traders and merchants of all descriptions flocked to Mamora to buy or barter for the booty which the pirates had brought in. Besides Moors and Jews, there were Dutch, English, French, Italians and even Spaniards all eager to do business. They brought goods which the pirates might have found hard to come by in the normal course of pillage, and left laden with sugar, wines, wood, spices, indigo, cochineal and any other cargoes



Wardes first Fight going foorth from *Plimouth* in a *man of Warre, & of his practises* & proceedings in the Streights, and of his comming to *Argier.*

Chapter I.

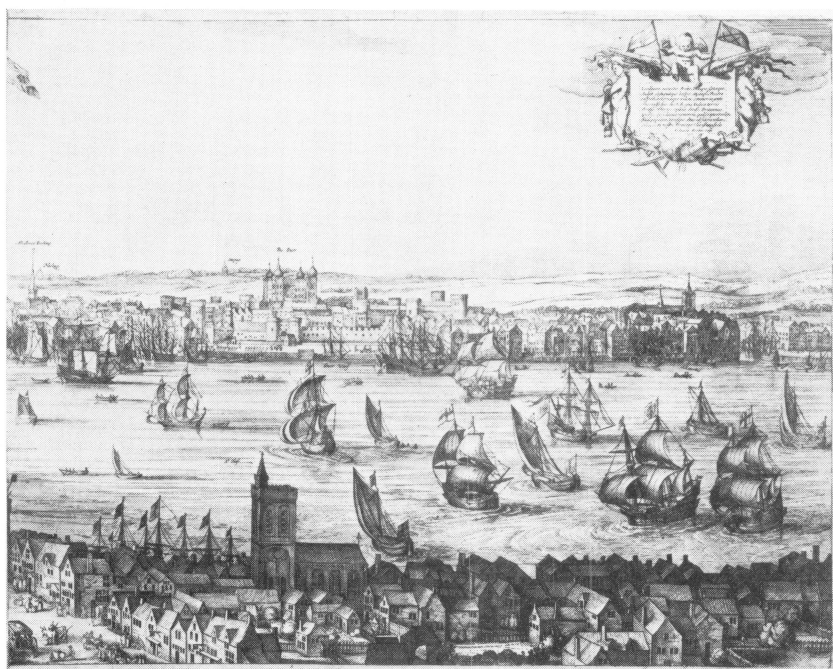
His *Ward*, as base in
Birth as bad in condition, in the
last yeare of her late *Maiesties*
raigne, gaue the first onset to his
wicked intendments: his paren-
tage was but meane, his estate
lowe, and his hope lesse. His pro-
fession was a fisherman of *Feuer-*
sham in *Kent*, though his pride at last would be confinde
to no limits, nor any thing would serue him but the wide
Ocean to walke in. In this wicked resolution, he set
foorth from *Feuersham* in a small *Catch* towards *Pli-*
mouthe.

He stayed not long there, but he betooke himselfe to
the



(above) London's Thames in the early 17th century, showing the swarms of light craft plying above the narrow arches of London Bridge . . .

(below) . . . and the dense merchant shipping in the Pool of London, offering rich – and easy – pickings to the most casual plunderer



which had chanced to fall into the pirates' hands. Guns, powder, victuals, beer, wine, aqua vitae, tobacco, pipes, playing cards, dice, opium, trinkets, all manner of clothes from fancy hats and doublets to hose and shoes; these and other necessities and trifles were the stock-in-trade which the greedy merchants used to separate the pirates from their loot. One Englishman named Powell actually persuaded his 'customers' to let him have one of their prizes, the *Angola Man*, a great ship, which he used 'as his storehouse or shop for sale of his said apparell and goodes.'¹

Some Italian ports in particular carried on a thriving trade in contraband. The Florentines had a regular route for the disposal of goods shipped from Mamora, which were landed at Leghorn, carried overland to the Atlantic ports of Goro and Ancona and then reshipped to the Levant. English traders seem to have played a prominent part in this illegal traffic. For instance, James Duppa, an English resident at Leghorn, is known to have sent several ships to Mamora to trade with the pirates; but then his brother Michael was one of the leading pirate captains there.

Excellent as it was as a base for the disposal of their booty, Mamora could not fulfil all the pirates' needs. Beef, mutton, beer, timber, pitch, sailcloth, powder and other supplies could best be obtained in northern Europe. Also, if the pirates were to cruise the length and breadth of the North Atlantic they desperately needed a northern base to complement Mamora. But there was an even more pressing need for an alternative base of operations. Each year as the weather became warmer and the seas around the Straits of Gibraltar grew calmer, galleys and other peace-keeping forces began to put to sea in sufficient numbers to hinder the pirates' activities and increase the risk of capture. Thus, in the spring or early summer the prudent pirate captain set his course northward, usually for Ireland, 'that Nursery and Storehouse of Pirates'.²

Ireland had a long history of flirtation with piracy going back to the sixteenth century and probably earlier. Her south-west coastline was a veritable pirates' paradise, hundreds of miles of hidden harbours, remote bays, small islands, deep-water anchorages and protective headlands and capes. Also, the south-west

or Munster coast was the first landfall for ocean-going shipping approaching the British Isles. For the pirate, Munster had the additional attraction of being a remote and unruly province which sometimes, to the frustration of the English Lords of the Privy Council, seemed to be beyond the control of either London or Dublin. In 1616, Lord Falkland, the Lord Deputy of Ireland, described some of the advantages which Ireland afforded pirates and went on to suggest that the pirates should be pardoned and set to work on the coast in the interests of the crown,

... being here much more cheaply victualled, much more easily out and in, at and from sea, which lies opener with less impediments of tides and channels, and lands ends and capes to double, which require varieties of wind to serve them together with the singular and secure harbours for ships of all burthens to ride in all weathers.

Yet another factor encouraged pirates to resort to Ireland. Because of a loophole in the law, pirates who were captured there could escape scot-free by pleading 'benefit of clergy'. This was a farce whereby a patently guilty but literate pirate could not be tried in a secular court. The only way round the problem was to send the prisoner to England for trial, but keeping a man in gaol and arranging for him to be escorted over to England was a tedious and costly business and usually all but the most hardened offenders were freed (on at least one occasion it was the hardened offenders who were released by mistake). This anomalous situation continued to plague the Lord Deputy of Ireland throughout the early years of the century, and was only ended when Irish law was finally brought into line with that of England in 1613.

The main centre of pirate activity was the extreme south-west of Munster between Cape Clear and Mizen Head, where the sea breaks up through 'Carbery's Hundred Isles' making what is suggestively called Roaringwater Bay. Baltimore, Long Island and Sherkin Island were all places in the bay much frequented by the pirates, but their main stronghold was Leamcon. All that bears the name today is a solitary house and a watch-tower, but

in the seventeenth century Leamcon was the name given to a whole peninsula joined to the mainland by a narrow causeway. Its western tip, known as Castle Point, is still guarded by the ruins of a castle which is itself cut off from the peninsula by a chasm which probably gave rise to the name Leamcon, meaning Dog's Leap in Gaelic. The peninsula is guarded by steep cliffs rising more than a hundred feet out of the sea in places, but in the east the land falls towards a spot, still known as Gun Point, where the pirates are thought to have constructed some makeshift fortification. Leamcon harbour itself, on the north-west side of the peninsula, guarded by a small island and a maze of sunken rocks, is reputed to be 'one of the dirtiest bottoms known', which no doubt made it even more secure from attack from the sea.

Not that the pirates had much need for protection. Almost all the population around Roaringwater Bay was hand in glove with them. By rights the economy of the Munster coast should have been no more than an indolent agricultural and fishing community could support, but, as one English agent reported: 'That which passeth here is rialls of eight, Barbary ducats, and dollars, and it is thought some treasure is buried on land by these pirates.'³ Strange indeed that while they claimed to be dominated by a band of ruthless cut-throats, the ships of the local inhabitants were rarely interfered with, their houses were never razed to the ground and the people went unmolested.

Of course the locals' best defence against charges of aiding and abetting was to claim that the pirates had appeared in such strength that they had had no alternative but to entertain them and supply their wants. Pirates were certainly the best of customers, usually rich, often generous and prepared to pay inflated prices for their supplies. Trade could be carried on clandestinely, by leaving goods on shore at a prearranged place to be collected under cover of night. However, in the unlikely event of discovery such underhand measures were bound to be incriminatory. It was far more popular for the pirates to pretend to carry off their provisions by force:

... for those that are the theifs and most able relievers of them suffer their goods to be taken forcibly, for which they receive payment to the double valewe, and by that meanes thinke to be freed from the penalty of divers proclamacions forbidding comerce with them . . .⁴

The pirates resorted to the coast so often and with such regularity that supplying their needs soon assumed the proportions of a well-run industry. Although the province itself depended on outside supplies of foodstuffs such as beer, bread, cheese and butter, the population could provide the pirates with these in plenty. Dubious establishments (known as alehouses) sprang up on remote parts of the coast, and it was reported that pirates,

... may be enterteyned and kept in those alehouses three moneths or more without payment for anything they take, every pyrate having his factor there for whom hee provideth men and other necessities against their arrivall, and then receiveth payment largely for his paynes, soe that it is a perpetuall markett for that trafficque.⁵

Yet there was no real need for secrecy. The local towns and villages were unwilling to miss their share of the proceeds from pirate booty. Most of the population of Baltimore was living off contraband. Thomas Crook, a Justice of the Peace and chief officer of the port, victualled pirate ships, entertained their crews in his house and, in partnership with a man named Sammon, had a monopoly of buying cloth from the pirates who came into harbour. It is scarcely surprising that the rest of the inhabitants of Baltimore felt free to trade openly with pirates. In 1607 almost everyone in the town was engaged in barter with Captain Richard Robinson and his crew, who brought in a prize laden with indigo, cochineal and ginger and then proceeded to dissipate their profits 'in most riotous manner'.⁶ Massalin, a local butcher, once slaughtered 200 cows in Crook's backyard to feed the pirate crews. No doubt most of the townsfolk managed to get their hands on at least some of the pirates' booty, for 'generallie the inhabitants theerabout doe give them entertainment in theire houses, which is donne . . . by the moste parte for

gaine, they takeinge excessivelie of them for such victualles as they sell them.’⁷

If the pirates could freely visit Baltimore (which was, after all, a sizeable town and the base of the solitary English naval pin-nace which patrolled the Irish coast in summer), it can be imagined how little the rule of law prevailed in the remoter settlements of the province. Just across Roaringwater Bay, at Leamcon, pirate rule was absolute. There even Mr Way, the local vicar, had been openly observed to ‘victualle and entertaine all manner of pirates’.⁸ To the north, in Bantry Bay, Whiddy Island was another notorious victualling point, the two most infamous offenders being John Stiles, who ran a thriving business providing for the pirates’ needs, and Mr Davenent, another islander who is known to have victualled the pirate ships of Bishop, Easton and Coward with ‘beeves and muttes’.⁹

Yet victuals and other provisions were only one part of a pirate captain’s needs. He also had to trim, modify or even careen his vessel and the Munster coast was ideal for this. The pirates were also usually in need of crew members and these were readily available from the ‘Guest houses upon the Shore, which are commonly full of Idle Men’,¹⁰ or else there were others ready to serve who came from England for the express purpose of joining up.

The coastal population soon adapted its amenities to meet the pirates’ more personal requirements. Mainwaring in his *Discourse of Pirates* noted that ‘they have also good store of English, Scottish and Irish wenches which resort unto them, and these are strong attractors to draw the common sort of them thither.’¹¹ Prostitution was evidently almost as attractive a prospect as buccaneering. One night, a man called Gibbs loaded his Devonshire bark with booty and sailed away, and ‘carryed with him two of the pyratts and some of their whores, aboute fyve in number.’¹²

Notoriety bred success in Munster. The coast soon became the catchment area for all the worst elements in society. Men brought provisions to the pirates from other parts of Ireland, under cover of carrying them to the fishermen at Crookhaven. For example, Henry Cook of Cork delivered twenty-two barrels

of beer for Captain Wolmer's ship at Leamcon. However, the main suppliers came from the west of England. Many Englishmen came to deal with the pirates under the guise of fishing, trading or even 'under the colour of planting'.¹³ Some settled permanently in Ireland in order to continue their illicit trade with greater ease. Others came simply to join a pirate crew and cash in on the new-found prosperity. These dealings of the English, whatever their nature, were always well disguised, for once again it was made to appear as if the pirates were in complete control of events, 'both to keep the men from impunitye whoe seeme to be forced to that course of life, and themselves likewise whoe complayne of the losse of their voyage when they have best made it.'¹⁴

The problem of how to prevent the population from collaborating with the pirates was almost insoluble. In 1609 the vice-president of Munster, Sir Richard Moryson, set out the difficulties facing the government fairly succinctly: 'The continual repair of the pirates to the western coast of this province, in consequence of the remoteness of the place, the wildness of the people, and their own strength and wealth both to command and entice relief, is very difficult . . . to prevent or remedy.'¹⁵ Three years later the trade in contraband was still booming and the problems of prevention were just as great. In his frustration, Lord Deputy Chichester exclaimed, 'This pest is grown so strong and so general as we are no more able to struggle with it.'¹⁶

Out at sea the pirates followed systematic patterns of search. If they had just cruised the ocean in an indiscriminate fashion their chances of taking prizes would have been greatly reduced. Of course they could not allow their operations to become too predictable: that would have frightened off their prey and made themselves an easier target for peace-keeping forces. Usually, the risks involved in selecting locations were commensurate with the chances for plunder. For example, the seas in the vicinity of the Straits of Gibraltar were a bottleneck for merchant vessels and were consequently better patrolled. This was especially true during the summer months as Captain Peter Boniton discovered to his cost. Boniton, a Cornishman, described as 'one of

Piracy—cont.

of, 110–11, 116; euphemisms
for, 13; on land, 124

Plumleigh, Captain Richard, 144

Powel, Michael, 39

Powell, Mr, 53

Primrose, 24, 119

Privateers and pirates differen-
tiated, 8

Privy Council, 138, 143

Prong, 27

Prophet, Jonas, 19

Prostitution, 38, 57

Rainbow, 70

Randal, William, 64

Recruitment for piracy, 15

Reis, Issouf, *see* Ward, John

Reniera e Soderina, *see* *Soderina*

Reprisals against informers, 119–
20

Resistance, 73

Restarrock, William, 133, 135

Retirement from piracy, 39–40

Rickman, Robert, 23

Roaringwater Bay, 54–5, 57

Roberts, Bartholomew, 32

Robinson, Captain Richard, 30,
38–9, 56, 69

Rooke, Captain Gilbert, 61, 67

Royal, 24

Rubi, 91

Rushley, John, 133

Russel. Robert. 27–8

Santa Cruz, Marquis of, 96

Santa Maria, 88

Savoy, Duke of, 69, 72, 100

Saxbridge, Captain Tibalt, 28,
35, 64–5, 67–8

Sayer, Ambrose, 98

Scaramelli, Giovanni, 82–3

Scottle, Garret, 117

Scilly Isles, 70, 126

Sherkin Island, 139

Skelton, John, 120–1

Smith, John, 29

Smith, Philip, 37

Sockwell, Captain Thomas, 36,
40, 87

Soderina, 22, 39, 41, 91–3, 101–
2, 107

Son, 65

Stakes, Henry, 22, 116

Star Chamber, 135

Stephenson, Captain Robert, 24,
27, 30–1, 38, 67, 71

Stiles, John, 57

Stow, John, 112, 114–15

Survey of London (Stow), 112

Susan Constance, 77

Swinsbury, William, 129

Tatum, Lawrence, 119

Taylor, John, 114

Thames, pirates of the River, 46,
110–23

Thickpenny, Captain, 139

Thames, pirates of the River, 46

pirates were quite ready to resort to torture. No doubt the

pirates had sources of intelligence amongst their friends and

- Turk, John Ward turns, 94-5
 Turks: in the ascendancy, 78-109 *passim*, 149; piracy using ports of, 78-84; rovers in the Atlantic, 75, 77
 Unemployment creates piracy, 9-10
 Ushant, 59, 65
 Van Dongen, William, 122
 Van Meteren, Dhr, 105
 Vaughan, Captain Alexander, 36
 Venetian losses to piracy, 108
Veniera (later *Fox*), 80-1
 Verney, Sir Francis, 37, 98, 105
 Vice-admirals as accessories, 127-8
 Villefranche, 72, 100-1
 Villiers, George, Duke of Buckingham, 141, 143
Violet, 87-8
 Vivian, Francis, 126, 133, 135
 Vivian, Hannibal, 133, 135-6
 Walker, Captain, 31
 Walsingham, Captain Robert, 77, 146, 150
 Wapping, gallows at, 121
 Ward, Captain John (Issouf Reis), 20, 22, 25, 27, 29, 36, 37, 38, 39-40, 66, 87-94, 102, 105, 107
 Way, The Rev, 57
 Wealth of pirates, 39-40
 Webb, Captain Christopher, 60
 West Indies, operations in, 44, 65, 151
 Westmann Islands, Iceland, 63-4
 Whiddy Island, Ireland, 57
White Swan, 70
Why Not I?, 26
 Wilkinson, Captain, 19
William and Ralph, 23
 Williamson, Captain, 35, 67, 136
 Wiseman, Geoffrey, 25
 Wives of pirates, 39
 Wolmer, Captain, 58
 Women in pirates' lives, 38-9, 57
 Woodland, Captain John, 29
 Woolworth, Captain, 36
 Youghal, Ireland, 139

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